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CIA's Campus Recruitment: Secrets From Whom?

When the Senate Intelligence Committee headed by Frank Church (D-Idaho) completed its 1976 review of current CIA activities on university campuses, it wanted to report the simple fact that the CIA had covert relations with university professors and administrators to assist the agency in the recruitment of foreign students studying at their universities.

The CIA refused to permit that information to be made public, claiming that to do so would jeopardize national security. The committee, anxious to complete its work, gave in to the agency. The committee's final report stated that some university officials assisted the CIA by, among other things, making "introductions for intelligence purposes." The committee put the sentence in italics, noting that it gave less than a complete description of what the committee was concerned about.

There the committee stood until Harvard University issued guidelines that prohibited university officials from engaging in secret recruitment and students at the University of California sought the files of the CIA's relation to the university under the Freedom of Information Act. In both cases the CIA sought to stonewall.

When Harvard sent a copy of its guidelines to the CIA, Director Stansfield Turner wrote back expressing opposition to another section of the guidelines dealing with consulting arrangements for research purposes. On the question of recruitment, he wrote only that the CIA conducts all of its staff recruitment openly.

It took Harvard a year of negotiation to get Turner to admit that there was

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an issue of secret recruitment. Turner would not confirm directly that the CIA was conducting secret recruitment on the Harvard campus or that it had ever done so. He did, however, state that the CIA would not give assurances that it was abiding by the Harvard rules, which require recruiters to publicly identify themselves and to secure the permission of the individual before giving his name to the CIA. The CIA, he wrote, would continue to feel free to approach Harvard faculty members to ask them to become secret recruiters and to engage in covert operations

abroad, another activity prohibited by the Harvard guidelines.

In the case of the University of California, the agency began by refusing to confirm or deny the existence of any documents relating to covert relations between members of the faculty and the CIA. The agency maintained that position through the Freedom of Information Act appeals process and in its response to a lawsuit filed by the ACLU Project on National Security on behalf of the students (*Gardels v. CIA*).

Project counsel Jack Novik demanded that the agency file an affidavit explaining why it cannot confirm or deny the existence of files revealing covert connections between the University of California and the CIA. In response, the CIA filed an affidavit in which it finally admitted that it has covert relations with faculty members, who assist the agency in foreign intelligence activity.

Turner, in a speech before the annual meeting of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), made it clear that the ongoing program related to the recruitment of foreign students with the covert assistance of university personnel.

Thus, the information the CIA refused to permit the Church committee to make

public was not officially admitted by the agency. "Assist in making introductions for intelligence purposes" means the covert recruitment of foreign students studying on American campuses. Admittedly, the CIA was subject to some pressure from Harvard and the California lawsuit, but it made the information public without being ordered to do so by any court or, as far as one can tell, by direction of the White House.

There is no sign that the damage that the CIA warned of, and that it used to persuade a congressional committee to censor its report, has occurred. It should surprise no one that the CIA is now refusing further disclosure. While telling Harvard that it will not obey its regulations, it has asked the *Gardels* court to sustain its position that it not be required to state whether it has ever had any covert contact with professors at the University of California (and it is taking the same position with schools where similar requests are in various stages of the administrative process and litigation).

The agency has now spelled out its reasoning: If it becomes known that there is secret recruitment at a campus there will be pressure to find out who the professor is, and many academics

will refuse to cooperate with the agency in covert recruitment if the fact of their involvement is made public. Thus, the agency admits that the secret is to be kept not from foreign intelligence services, but from Americans for fear they will end the spying on their campuses if they learn about it.

That is precisely the point. A university has the right to prohibit its faculty from spying on its students, whether Americans or foreigners, for the purpose of determining if they might in turn spy on their own governments for the CIA, and it has the right to prohibit the passing of information about a student without his or her permission. The Harvard guidelines do precisely that. The AAUP has adopted a similar position, and the University of California is moving in the same direction.

The CIA's position is that it will not confirm that such activity is going on for fear that it will be stopped, and that it will not abide by university regulations that prohibit it. It is now easier to understand why the Church committee said that ongoing CIA activities threaten academic freedom and that the CIA does not feel constrained by anything other than the fear of embarrassment when it operates on the university campus.